

## Firearms licensing APP: Response to consultation

The authorised professional practice (APP) on firearms licensing, which was first published in 2014 and last updated in 2016, was reviewed and revised in 2022. Between 11 January 2023 and 10 March 2023, we invited feedback on the amended APP from members of the public, policing and other stakeholders through a public consultation. The consultation was publicised through a College of Policing news article and social media. College engagement teams made direct contact with key policing stakeholders, relevant central and local government organisations, individual forces, staff associations and charities. The consultation was also shared with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Firearms and Explosives Licensing Working Group (FELWG), the Home Office Enforcement Board and the Gun Control Network. An engagement event for shooting organisations was held to discuss the APP and opportunities to be involved in the consultation.

A total of 386 responses were received, of which:

- 281 were from members of the public
- 73 were from UK police forces and policing colleagues
- 3 were from national bodies and policing organisations
- 8 were from shooting organisations

Responses from policing covered 35 forces. The responses are summarised by question below.

The majority of respondents felt that the guidance was easy to understand. Of the respondents who disagreed, the most recurring feedback was that the APP contained jargon and was too open to interpretation. A number of consultees commented on the strength of language used (for example, on the use of 'should' rather than 'must')<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The College does not have powers to create new requirements on policing. When developing APP and other guidance, the College uses 'must' when there is law or strong evidence that a particular approach must be

Three-quarters of respondents felt that it was clear what firearms licensing staff and chief constables had to do as result of the APP. Of those who disagreed, most suggested that more detail was required (with some specifying where this additional detail was required) or that it was too open to interpretation and should be made more specific. A number of respondents said that performance indicators and explicit service levels were required.

Roughly half of respondents responded to the question of whether anything should be added, changed or removed from the APP. Some used this section to share experiences of firearms licensing and/or did not directly respond to the question. Suggestions for content to be added, changed or removed included more content and detail on:

- levels of service and timescales
- training
- medical suitability
- contact and responsiveness
- professional contact (these responses also included perceptions of how respondents had been treated)
- staffing and resourcing
- specific firearms
- implementation
- fees and requirements

Some also used this section to raise other concerns, including perceptions from some respondents that the APP and/or police are against gun ownership.

We asked consultees about their perceptions of the potential impacts of the APP on individuals, groups or communities. A total of 310 respondents answered this question.

- Around 4 in 10 respondents felt that the APP had potential positive impacts, although a number of these respondents felt that this was dependent on other factors.
- 81 respondents felt that the APP would have a negative impact.

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used for the guidance to be effective. Where there is not law but good evidence and/or a consensus of expert opinion for the adoption of a particular approach, we use 'should'. In those circumstances where one or more forces have used a particular approach that appears to have been successful but there is no or little evaluation, other forces 'could' use that approach.

- Approximately 1 in 5 people felt that the APP would not have potential positive or negative impacts, while a small number of respondents felt it would have both.
- 23 respondents used this section to comment on the APP and 7 used it to flag content that they felt was missing from the APP.

The following changes have been made as a result of the consultation feedback.

- Wording was strengthened where appropriate.
- Information was added on the use of the national decision model in firearms licensing decisions.
- Information was added in relation to delegated authority.
- A section on the importance of delivering a good service was added.
- The concept and appropriateness of voluntary surrender of firearms was clarified and the section on options for short-notice removal of firearms and certificates was amended.
- The term 'weapon' was removed.
- Detail was added on engagement and good practice.
- Detail was added on quality assurance.